6. COMMUNICATION TRAITS AMONG MALE ADOLESCENTS IN URBAN CONSTITUENCIES: A FOCUS ON THE NAMIBIAN CAPITAL CITY OF WINDHOEK Florida Gaingos & Clayton Peel

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ABSTRACT

Male adolescents endure complex transitions from childhood. This is because "adolescence is a developmental period characterised by rapidly transformative biological, neurological, psychological and social changes" (Nguyen et al., 2022). This study explored, through positivist and interpretivist research lenses, the interpersonal and nonverbal communication traits of a sample of male adolescents in two urban constituencies of Windhoek, the capital city of the southern African nation of Namibia. The subjective permutations of the research subjects' lived experiences are explored through structured focus group discussions and administered questionnaires. In both data collection arrangements, the researchers sought to converse with and listen carefully to the target population, and because it consisted of male adolescents aged 13 – 18 years, drawn from the twin urban constituencies of Windhoek West and East, the researchers ensured that parental permission was sought and obtained, and that trusted adults – teachers, pastors, and other youth support workers – were present as observers during both formats of data gathering. According to the latest available census statistics, Windhoek East had 1175 adolescents and Windhoek West 4838. The research tools used to collect data for this study were a questionnaire and two focus group discussions. The study sought to explore the perception that male adolescents find it difficult to express themselves while dealing with life's challenges, but may convey nonverbal cues, intentionally or unintentionally, about their state of mind. The intuition behind the research was that what male adolescents do and say may differ from how they feel because they often do not candidly verbalize their subjective thoughts. The study's objectives and significance are twofold: to provide parents, social workers, and other stakeholders with insight into the challenges affecting male adolescents, their communication, and behaviour, and to enhance scholarly understanding of how nonverbal cues might shape adolescent behaviour. The research gap focuses on how Namibian adolescent males negotiate their lived realities not only through visible traits, but also through nonverbal and interpersonal cues that parents and mentors may not easily detect. The study recommends that adolescent male communication traits should not be approached through authoritarian adult-to-adolescent discourses. In fact, understanding adolescent attitudes requires appreciating the range of pressures that may or may not resemble the experiences of contemporary adults. This study therefore recommends using skilled intermediaries such as social workers, youth counselors, pastors, and behavioral psychologists to bridge the communication gaps that arise.

Keywords: Adolescence, interpersonal communication, nonverbal communication, Namibia

Introduction

Adolescents are typically affected by relationships with their parents, peers, and community, and these relationships shape how male adolescents view themselves and how they communicate and develop emotionally, physically, and in their self-esteem (DeLooze et al., 2020). This study focuses on traits of interpersonal and nonverbal communication among male adolescents and what those traits may convey to those who work and live with male adolescents. This Communication Studies inquiry examines nonverbal and interpersonal traits and perspectives articulated by adolescent males. Conducted among adolescent males in the Namibian capital city, Windhoek, from August to October 2023, the inquiry explored whether, and if so, how, interpersonal and nonverbal communication traits might be conveyed. The interest also relates to how these traits might reflect what Nguyen et al. call "the care competencies of adolescents and their relationships with well-being" (Nguyen et al., 2022, p. 713). This is because what and how adolescent males communicate is often an indicator of behavioural inclination, such as, for instance, sexual activity and preference, as well as cultural and religious beliefs (Exner-Cortens et al., 2021)

Adolescence is a vital stage of development where teens are impressionable and may be easily influenced by their parents, peers, and their community at large (Abrams, 2023). Male adolescents chart a unique and sometimes difficult journey as they transition from childhood. This is because "adolescence is a developmental period characterised by rapidly transformative biological, neurological, psychological, and social changes. These dynamic transitions may place [adolescents] at risk of ill-being" (Nguyen et al., 2022, p.713). In addition, the characteristics of male adolescent interpersonal communication may often exert unique behavioural and psychological challenges that accentuate the "emotionally arousing stressors (especially achievement challenges)" to a greater extent than they might do to female adolescents, according to Li and Fenderson (2021, p.1)

According to Lewis (2022, p. 519), "adolescence is the unique period in the life history of an individual characterised by a myriad of changes related to sexual maturation, growth, immunological transformation, and emotional and cognitive development ... a proxy for the physical development associated with sexual maturation (puberty)". The way male adolescents in a Namibian context view themselves, as well as how they communicate, needs to be explored to understand the traits of interpersonal and nonverbal communication that male adolescents exhibit, which may be important to detecting any possibilities of extreme behaviour.

It has been pointed out that although most adolescents report a high and stable level of well-being, "a minority of young people report a lower level of well-being and mirror a number of subjective mental health worries. Around the world, about 20% of adolescents experience a behavioural problem or mental disorder" (Nguyen et al., 2022, p. 713).

This study makes no presumption of a pervasive crisis in adolescent thinking and behaviour among any segment of the adolescent population of Namibia. However, the study draws the attention of scholars globally to adolescent "ill-being" which includes mood and behavioral disorders, and "the dual complexities of outbursts and suicidal behavior. Children who threaten to kill themselves when enraged are a significant health concern…" (Carlson & Singh, 2021, p. xv).

Importantly, this work is not intended as a socio-psychological study, but rather as a Communication Studies focus on interpersonal and nonverbal traits as factors in determining adolescent "ill-being" or otherwise (Nguyen et al., 2022, p. 713). Because these forms of communication convey subtle cues which may easily be missed, especially in the case of adolescent males who are not renowned for their forthrightness on issues that trouble them (Fontenot, 2021), it behooved the researchers in this study to engage adolescents with the help of trusted adults with whom the research participants could freely converse – not family members, but counsellors such as occupational youth workers, educators and religious leaders. By speaking with adolescent males about their perceptions and interpersonal communication in an environment made as unintimidating as possible, the researchers hoped to gain insight into how adolescent males in Windhoek viewed their relationships with those around them. To that end, nonverbal communication was examined as a latent yet important form of expression (Oggiano & Adriani, 2023).

Literature Review

A study by Reid et al. (2021) about interpersonal communication traits among 1170 American males aged between

14 and 19 and considered prone to criminal and anti-social activity showed that traits such as “fearless temperament” or “boredom susceptibility” could disadvantage young males and make them vulnerable to “serious forms of exploitation” (Reid et al., 2021, p. 120). The study subjects were adolescents recruited for a survey in Florida. The study findings correlated teenage traits like “impulsivity” and “emotional dysregulation” with a higher likelihood of being exploited, commercially and sexually (Reid et al., 2021, p. 120). “Emotional dysregulation” is a term used to describe a response that “does not fall within the traditionally accepted range of emotional reactions” but “can engage in high-risk behaviours, putting (adolescents’) well-being at risk” (Keeshin et al., 2021, p.375). The conclusion reached in Reid et al.’s study was that nonverbal traits could reflect attitudes that differentially disadvantage young people and put them at greater risk of exploitation. Reid et al believed their findings “could be beneficial to prevention efforts supporting male adolescents at risk” of exploitation and could also “shed new light on the theoretical understanding of vulnerability” of adolescent males (Reid et al., 2021, p. 120).

Nonverbal traits can signal behavioural intent, some of which may lead to adverse outcomes (Reid et al., 2021). For instance, some adolescents have strained relationships with their biological parents, step-parents or guardians as a result of a communication breakdown. If solutions are sought primarily from what has been verbalized, some contributory factors to adolescent male behavior and the strains they cause in relationships may be missed (Chin, 2024).

It has been pointed out that although most adolescents report a high and stable level of well-being (Fino et al., 2023), “a minority of young people report a lower level of well-being and mirror several subjective mental health worries. Around the world, about 20% of adolescents experience a behavioural problem or mental disorder (Nguyen et al., 2022, p.713). This research should address, statistically and qualitatively, self-reported levels of well-being and related factors among adolescent males in an urban sub-Saharan African context such as Windhoek, Namibia.

Effective interpersonal and nonverbal communication when interacting with parents, peers, and the wider society is considered crucial for the stability of male adolescents (Patterson, 2018). The issues of temperament raised in the existing literature about male adolescents and their communication (Reid et al., 2021), especially regarding relations with their parents and peers (DeLooze et al., 2020), prompted interest in exploring the communication traits of Namibian adolescent males, particularly in parts of the capital city, Windhoek. Using the Expectancy Value Theory as its interpretative framework, our study applied Fishbein’s concept that an individual is motivated by two factors: the value of the action and the expectation of success when completing the action (Bergann et al., 2025). The Theoretical Framework is discussed at length below.

Justification for the study

We undertook this study to garner the sentiments of Namibian male adolescents navigating a fast-changing, highly competitive society. We used a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to get a broad understanding of the dynamics at play. Parents, adolescents, educators, youth workers, and counselors stand to benefit from a more nuanced understanding of interactions among male adolescents, which is central to this study's deliverables. In addition, communication studies, specifically human nonverbal communication and its role in understanding human development and interaction among adolescent males, can draw on the research subjects' reflections. Such reflections cannot easily be gathered through casual inquiries outside therapy sessions and academic inquiry. This academic inquiry was structured to draw on adolescent males' experiences and tested a correlation between their nonverbal communication traits and the individual inner struggles that accompany adolescent development (Lougheed, 2019; Oggiano & Adriani, 2023). The researchers were mindful of their need as adults to divest themselves of the status of “older person” in their engagements with the research subjects, in order not to recreate the power dynamics that potentially marginalise adolescents in the home and wider society (Lougheed, 2019). The aim was to engage with the young men in an egalitarian, non-judgmental framework to help them feel at ease, avoid embarrassment, and encourage their open participation in the survey and focus group discussions.

Theoretical Framework

When applied to communication, Expectancy Value Theory asserts that an individual is motivated by two factors: the value of the action and the expectation of success when completing the action. When applied to adolescent male behavior, the theory helps interpret how adolescents engage in a specific action, motivated by a specific reward or sense of value they perceive at the time. Adolescents may be motivated to impress their peers and, in doing so, conduct themselves in ways that depart from their usual temperament or moral behavior. Thus, they may be motivated to do wrong, but the core justification is the value they will get from that behavior: peer approval.

Adolescence is a vital stage of childhood development, as teens tend to be impressionable and can be easily influenced by their parents, peers, and the community at large (Wallace, 2021). When not living up to these expectations, male adolescents can become mentally unwell, which in turn can lead to discontent. Male adolescents go through difficult times as they transition from childhood. This is because "adolescence is a developmental period characterised by rapidly transformative biological, neurological, psychological, and social changes. These dynamic transitions may place [adolescents] at risk of ill-being" (Nguyen et al., 2022, p.713).

The hypothesis to be tested

Given the Expectancy Value Theory described above, which suggests that adolescent male behaviour is gratification-based, that is to say, it is influenced by the immediate benefits the adolescent perceives will ensue from his choices and actions in a particular situation and at a particular time, the behaviour and choices of adolescent males in the two Windhoek constituencies will be analysed emically (described as "data from the perspective of of the research subject" by Cyr, 2019, p. 10). This means that the research subjects' responses, through the research tools, will be used to test the theory, particularly regarding the influence of peer pressure on male adolescents' conduct.

Delimitations and limitations

Delimitations of a research study are the parameters that researchers deliberately set to make the study's objectives feasible (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). This study focused on adolescent males from Windhoek East and Windhoek West, the two central urban constituencies of Namibia's capital. It did not engage male adolescents across the entire municipal jurisdiction of the City of Windhoek. Other constituencies within the municipal boundaries were excluded. The central urban constituencies have a historical demographic profile of middle- to higher-income families, and although this did not motivate the selection of the two constituencies for this study, variation in adolescent identities between affluent and peripheral constituencies has been documented (Wiafe et al., 2021). For instance, Wiafe et al. have observed how

physical characteristics such as built structures, air and water quality, indoor and outdoor noise, greenspace, housing and waste removal systems directly affect health through the environmental exposures of neighbourhood residents, including adolescents. Additionally, a neighborhood's social environment, with its unique social networks, existence or lack of support structures, or levels of cohesion, for instance, has also been shown to greatly influence adolescent health. For example, social environments of neighbourhoods affect adolescent self-identity, sense of safety, and esteem (Wiafe et al., 2021, p. 7637).

This research does not analyze differences between adolescent identities in urban and peripheral constituencies, nor does it consider socio-economic status in participant sampling. Instead, the research focuses indiscriminately on adolescent males resident in Windhoek East and West.

According to Al Azher and Alhoori (2024), research limitations are restrictions in a study that are beyond the researchers' control. A study may be limited by circumstances, such as lack of access to primary and secondary sources, the disposition of informants, or the sensitivity of the subject. In this study, issues of trust and the need for reassurance about confidentiality contributed to reticence. Some participants were uncomfortable discussing their traits or experiences which could be construed as weaknesses. They needed reassurance that the research was a scholarly investigation to shed light on and find possible solutions to the struggles that adolescent males, in particular, may not have forums to discuss. To mitigate fears and establish trust, the researchers read through the statement of informed consent with each participant, in which the benefits of the research were explained to the participant, as were the emphasis on voluntary participation, the reassurance of privacy and confidentiality, and a

commitment from the researchers to do all possible to minimise the risk of harm to those informants who elected to participate.

The researchers were conscious of another limitation posed by the age gap: that they were an adult male and an adult female inquiring into the behavioral traits of male adolescents, who are at an impressionable age. Some participants needed considerable encouragement to co-operate with strangers and answer their questions.

Research methods and study sites

The research was conducted in a controlled environment, where subjects were canvassed within the schools or church youth groups they attended. This allowed the research to be conducted in the presence of responsible adults: school officials at the institutions where questionnaires were distributed and a church worker at the site where two focus groups were conducted. The presence of independent, responsible adults during data gathering ensured that the research was conducted in an atmosphere of discipline and order and that it was safe and familiar for the respondents. Questionnaires were distributed at eight schools across the two constituencies of Windhoek East and West, and teaching staff were assigned to accompany the researchers and observe their engagements with the adolescents. The researchers were available to explain the aims and modalities of the research, and to motivate how the research findings might enhance Namibian society's understanding of adolescent males' inclinations and their often unverbalised sense of reality. In addition, two separate focus group discussions, each consisting of five adolescents, were conducted at a Lutheran Church in the presence of a church youth worker known and trusted by the participants. This reassured participants that a trusted authority, concerned with their welfare and known to many of them, was present to observe and ensure that the proceedings did not harm the adolescents involved or pressure them into making statements under duress.

The target population consisted of male adolescents aged between 13 and 18 years who resided in the two urban constituencies of Windhoek West and Windhoek East. According to the Namibia Statistics Agency's 2011 Population and Housing census, Windhoek East had 1175 male adolescents, and Windhoek West had 4838 (Steytler, 2011). Because the two subsequent national censuses did not provide adolescent-specific data, we drew on the 2011 figures and their reference to a combined population of 6 013 male adolescents.

Using an online sample size calculator, we were guided towards a sample size of 384 for a population of 6013. In the end, 104 survey respondents agreed to meet us. Even then, not all the respondents answered all the questions. Adding 10 participants from two focus group discussions to the 104 still left the sample as a fraction of the high-confidence target of 384. This was despite the use of criterion sampling, whereby the researchers deliberately targeted church youth groups and secondary schools to increase the likelihood of obtaining a larger, more representative sample.

Results and discussion

Quantitative Data

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
13-14	25	24.5	24.5
15-16	57	55.9	55.9
17-18	20	19.6	19.6
Total	102	100	100

Table 2: Respondents' level of education

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Below Grade 10	83	81.4	81.4

Grade 10	3	2.9	2.9
Grade 12	1	1	1
Vocational School	15	14.7	14.7
Total	102	100	100

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by geographic location

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Windhoek West	72	70.6	70.6
Windhoek East	30	29.4	29.4
Total	102	100	100

Table 4: Do you ever feel misinterpreted or misunderstood?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	20	20	20
Less Than Often	28	28	28
often	38	38	38
Everyday	14	14	14
Total	100	100	100

Most adolescent respondents (52%) said they felt misunderstood by adults close to them and by society at large (14% every day, 38% often), while 48% felt misunderstood less than often (28%) or never at all (20%). Although the difference is only 4%, the majority finding confirmed a dominant feeling among male adolescent respondents of being misunderstood by their parents, family members, and wider society.

Table 5: I can ask for help if something is upsetting me

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	19	18.62	18.62
Somewhat Disagree	12	11.76	11.76
Remain Neutral	19	18.62	18.62
Strongly Agree	27	26.47	26.47
Somewhat Agree	27	26.47	26.47
Total	102	100	100

When asked whether they would be inclined to ask for help from someone else if in a state of upset, nearly 53% of the respondents believed this would be the case (26.47% strongly agree; 26.47% somewhat agree). Those who disagreed were around 30% (21.84 strongly disagree, 11.83% somewhat disagree). 11% of the respondents did not express a view either way.

Table 6: I can tell my friends how I feel and seek their advice

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent

Strongly Disagree	24	21.84	21.84
Somewhat Disagree	13	11.83	11.83
Remain Neutral	12	10.92	10.92
Strongly Agree	22	20	20
Somewhat Agree	20	18.2	18.2
Total	91	100	100

The feedback in the table immediately above suggests that when it comes to peers ("friends"), adolescents may be more reticent to "tell my friends how I feel". Only 38.2% were in agreement with the statement (20% strongly agree, 18.2% somewhat agree), as opposed to 34% who cumulatively responded adversely to being open with their peers (21.84% strongly disagree, 11.83% somewhat disagree). Another 10.92% did not express a view either way. This lack of confidence, even among their peers, suggests that male adolescents have difficulty sharing emotions, including issues that trouble them. This aligns with a previous study by Reid et al. (2021), which highlighted the introverted nature of confronting emotions among many adolescents, often resulting in temperamental outbursts (World Health Organization, 2024).

However, evidence of significant peer influence emerged in feedback from qualitative focus group discussions conducted with a different set of adolescent participants than those canvassed in the quantitative inquiry, whose outcomes are reported in Table 6 above. Whereas the above data set shows a more reticent adolescent male characteristic of being uncomfortable with sharing subjective perceptions with peers, the feedback from the focus group interactions suggested evidence of peer and wider societal influences on adolescent male behaviours and perceptions as a result of interpersonal engagements where such influences occasionally were sought, and did occur (see findings in the qualitative data section that follows the quantitative report, further below).

Table 7: I have had thoughts of self- harm before

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	43	36.98	36.98
Somewhat Disagree	3	2.58	2.58
Remain Neutral	12	10.32	10.32
Strongly Agree	7	8.13	8.13
Somewhat Agree	21	18.06	18.06
Total	86	100	100

There was no definitive response to the sensitive question of whether respondents had previous inclinations to self-harm. Close to 40% indicated that they had not (36.98% strongly disagree, 2.58% somewhat disagree), while about 26% of the respondents agreed to having thoughts of self-harm (18.06% somewhat agree, 8.13% strongly agree). Another 10.32% did not indicate their position either way. A similar lack of a decisive trend in opinion emerged when the question was raised in the two focus group discussions.

Table 8: Do you ever feel misinterpreted or misunderstood?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	20	20	20
Less Than Often	28	28	28
Often	38	38	38
Everyday	14	14	14
Total	100	100	100

The majority of respondents to the question, "Do you (as an adolescent male) ever feel misinterpreted or misunderstood?", reported feeling misinterpreted and misunderstood by relatives, teachers, other mentors, and, at times, even by other adolescent males. As indicated in Table 8 above, 52% of respondents reported a regular pattern of adolescent males being misinterpreted and misunderstood (14% every day, 38% often). Conversely, 48% of the respondents indicated that they felt well understood, or hardly felt misinterpreted or misunderstood by others (28% less than often; 20% never).

While the difference in responses to whether adolescent males feel misinterpreted or misunderstood was just 4%, the majority of respondents who confirmed that they felt misunderstood and misinterpreted indicate a sense of alienation among substantial numbers of adolescent males in their interactions with each other and wider society. This aligns with the findings of another study by Delooze et al. (2020), which attests to the alienation between adolescent males' state of mind and adult perceptions of them.

It is also axiomatic that experiences of alienation by adolescent males, whether few or significant in number, may lead to generalisations that overshadow positive experiences of amity, thereby making male adolescents "the recipients of perpetual bigotry and condemnation" (Hawkin-Jones & Lahat, 2023, p. 3). It is therefore important that the adolescent male's latent and expressed traits rise above stereotypes, cultural views, and other interpersonal communication limitations to find expression in what Li and Fenderson call "interpersonal closeness" (Li & Fenderson, 2021, p. 1, 3).

Table 9: Do you perhaps misinterpret/misunderstand other people's verbal and/or nonverbal cues yourself? Please give examples.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	28	28	28
Less Than Often	30	30	30
often	35	35	35
Everyday	7	7	7
Total	100	100	100

This question was intended to invite introspection among adolescent males about how they might misinterpret or misunderstand others, and, in the process, misrepresent others' character and views. Most respondents (58%) indicated that they do not misinterpret nonverbal and verbal cues from others (28% never and 30% less than often), while 42% agreed that they do misinterpret and misunderstand (7% every day, 35% often). To a lesser extent, this feedback suggests that misinterpretation of other segments of society, particularly their nonverbal cues, is not limited to adolescent males, as a significant minority of adolescent males in the data set also confessed to misinterpreting others.

In the focus group discussions, it emerged that those adolescents who admitted to their misinterpretations and misunderstandings of others could cite cases where interest by adult relatives in the adolescents' well-being, romantic relationships, or academic progress was seen as meddlesome and, as one participant put it, "not any of the relatives' business". The adult relatives who made such inquiries might have done so lightheartedly, but in some cases might have wanted a serious conversation about issues of personal social development that they felt they could offer the adolescent guidance on. What seemed to irk some of the adolescent male respondents was being asked about their personal lives in a manner they felt was intrusive, even if well-meaning.

This sentiment from a significant minority of the male adolescents canvassed suggests that even the sincerest attempts by parents, older siblings, and other adults to understand how their male adolescent relative was navigating the transition from childhood obliviousness to making life choices in adolescence could be construed as intrusive. Even if this misapprehension occurred in a minority of cases, it nevertheless demonstrated communication barriers to "interpersonal closeness, self-disclosure and attachment styles" among adolescent males (Li & Fenderson, 2021, p. 2), in which that attachment lacks depth of interest and trust. Thus, citing Villanueva's 2017 study on interpersonal closeness, Li and Fenderson concluded that:

> […] interpersonal intimacy and self-disclosure directly affect relationship satisfaction and commitment while attachment style does not. This demonstrates the importance of sharing and opening up to another person in fostering closeness in relationships. (Li & Fenderson, 2021, p. 2)

Qualitative data

Two Focus Group Discussions, with five male adolescents in each group, were conducted in the second phase of the research. The adolescents' ages ranged from 13 to 18, and the discussion questions focused on societal influences on decision-making and behavior; male adolescent traits; peer pressure; discontent and contentment; and the use of interpersonal and nonverbal communication among male adolescents and with other age groups. Cyr (2019, p. 10) asserts that emic research entails gathering data from the subject's perspective. The idea behind this kind of data collection is that the researcher draws from the conceptual schemes and categories that the group (of respondents) deems meaningful and appropriate. In other words, researchers learn about the phenomenon through descriptions provided by a particular group or culture. Emic data privilege the subject's viewpoint.

The investigation sought to give weight to the participants' sentiments more than the researchers' observations (Cyr, 2019). The motivations of the research respondents are assessed in alignment with Fishbein's Expectancy-Value Theory, which, when applied to adolescent male behavior in this research context, considers expected immediate benefits as motivators of adolescent choices and actions.

Societal influences on how adolescents communicate

Participants in both FGDs were asked about the extent to which they received guidance in their attitudes and behaviour, and from whom they sought counsel. Each participant in either group felt dictated to by older members and the wider society on how to conduct themselves in various situations, including how to deploy emotions, verbalise their thoughts (e.g., whether to raise their voice or speak softly during conversations), and even in determining what constitutes acceptable or unacceptable, effective or ineffective communication. Examples were given of distressing experiences of adolescent pressures to conform to behavioural traits commonly associated with their age group. For instance, adolescent males were conditioned not to cry when distressed, as "real men don't cry". Not expressing emotions causes adolescent males to bottle up a lot of issues, which then find expression elsewhere, e.g., mood swings, drug and alcohol abuse, and even suicide (Nguyen et al., 2022).

Various research findings (e.g., Austgulen et al., 2024; Reid et al., 2021) have shown that unhealthy communication traits that suppress feelings, avoid professional help or the guidance of a responsible and caring adult, often lead to adolescent males seeking a false sense of security from peers who are ill-equipped to offer good counsel, and may guide the troubled adolescent into unwise decisions.

Furthermore, some of the focus group participants pointed to internal family dynamics that may not be conducive to open discussions about problems, including conflict resolution. This may, in some cases, result in the home and family being least likely to provide succor to troubled adolescents. Fitzgerald warns of the plight of "teenagers whose lives have been caught up in personal tragedy, who have been alienated even from grieving loved ones" (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 17) because of dysfunctional relationships within families. These dysfunctional relationships are caused by intra-family rifts as well as cultural traits that do not encourage adolescents to approach their parents with sensitive matters such as bereavements, romantic relationships, reproductive health, and other aspects of what Fitzgerald calls "teenage dreams and aspirations" (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 18).

Experience of peer pressure

The focus group participants agreed that peer pressure influenced their behaviours. Examples of such behavioral influence included neglecting their studies for recreational pursuits or being disruptive in class to gain peer approval. This suggests that peer pressure can significantly alter the behaviour of adolescent males seeking popularity among their age mates. However, this level of influence contrasts with the lack of significant peer influence reported in the quantitative survey data (Table 6 above), which showed greater reticence among adolescent males to share subjective perceptions with peers and to be influenced by groupthink. Feedback from the focus group interactions, however, suggested evidence of peer and wider societal influences on adolescent male behaviors and perceptions

through interpersonal engagements, where such influences occasionally occurred.
With regard to the question, "Are you happy with your life?", all participants in the focus group discussions shared the view that they were generally happy with their lives and had no major concerns.

Interpersonal and nonverbal communication amongst male adolescents

Participants argued that they enjoyed interacting more with fellow adolescents than with any other age demographic. The participants attributed this to the fact that they mostly enjoyed mutually respectful relations. As adolescents, they had learned appropriate cues for communicating and negotiating dissent among themselves (such as how to de-escalate a potential fight when disagreements seemed to be becoming emotional). Often, as peers and acquaintances, they knew when an inflammatory confrontation was brewing, partly based on past conflicts and also their knowledge of each other's temperaments, and could detect and avoid serious conflict by mutual de-escalation. Better communication, mutual understanding, and respect were important to cultivate in peer relationships, to detect dissent and resolve it as quickly and peacefully as possible, and to avoid ruptures in adolescent relationships. This finding of male adolescent amity in the focus group discussions contrasts with the reticence shown by respondents in the quantitative survey regarding sharing their concerns intimately with their agemates. The contrast can perhaps be explained by Atteloney and Wagner's findings in their study of African-American adolescent males, which suggest that variables such as academic achievement, religiosity, parenting styles, and experiences of discrimination may affect the individual adolescent's capacity for peer adolescent engagement and responsiveness to peer suggestion (Atteloney & Wagner, 2014).

Discussion of findings

This study used the Expectancy-Value Theory as its interpretative framework, introduced by Martin Fishbein in the 1970s (University of Twente, 2019). Expectancy-Value Theory, when applied to communication, states that an individual is motivated by two factors: the value of the action and the expectation of success in completing it (Part & Perera, 2022). When applied to adolescent behaviour, the theory helps explain how adolescents adopt a specific disposition or action because of a reward or value they perceive at the time. Adolescents may be motivated to impress their peers and, in doing so, behave in ways that depart from their usual temperament or moral behaviour. Thus, they may or may not be impulsively motivated when making their choice, but the core justification is in the value that they will get out of that behaviour, which may be peer approval from other adolescents, or comfort from the psychological safety net of "groupthink" (Kumar & Lai, 2025, p. 250). The Expectancy Value Theory was borne out when respondents highlighted the appeal and influence of peers, as well as the pressure and influence of family members, in making value decisions.

However, the extent to which conformity to other people's values influenced adolescent conduct differed between the focus group and survey participants. The findings show that while peer and wider societal influences, and the expectancy of rewards, motivated adolescent male behavior and perceptions of having to conform to the dominant view, focus group respondents attested to the phenomenon more emphatically than survey respondents.

It has been pointed out that although most adolescents report a high and stable level of well-being (O'Donnell et al., 2022), "a minority of young people report a lower level of well-being and mirror a number of subjective mental health worries. Around the world, about 20% of adolescents experience a behavioural problem or mental disorder" (Nguyen et al., 2022, p.713). For instance, Pereira et al. (2022) employed Jakubowski and Lange's "three main communication traits that relate to unique forms of verbal and nonverbal communication: assertiveness, passivity, and aggressiveness" to show the interrelatedness of norms of generating discontent. Pereira et al argue for example that assertiveness as "the expression of personal opinions, thoughts, needs, and feelings in a direct, honest, and adequate way" (Pereira et al., 2022, p. 112) may be lacking when behavioural traits are dominated by "an aggressive communication style" (Pereira et al., 2022, p. 112). These indicators of adolescent discontent provide broader context for the nonverbal and interpersonal traits discussed in the present study.

According to Brailovskaia et al. (2018), promoting a more circumspect and independent-minded style of communication among adolescent males is recommended to help them understand and better deal with existential

difficulties like peer pressure and bullying.

Conclusion

The study sought to investigate communication traits of male adolescents in Windhoek's urban constituencies. It established that there are four main communication traits: apprehension, which leads to verbal and physical aggressiveness (Cela-Bertran et al., 2024); lack of openness with parents and guardians; a significant degree of unease in expressing their emotions; and being more at ease with the counsel of agemates than with parents and adult professionals.

However, the adolescent male cohorts in this study do not exhibit a dominant sentiment of discontentment. Several variables were put to study participants about feelings of peer pressure, being misunderstood, being driven to consider self-harm, being rebellious, and being able to express and deal with their emotions. While most respondents appeared to seek and take counsel from their age mates rather than parents and older family members, the proportion of respondents who reported that they had considered drastic measures like self-harm or suicide to deal with societal pressures constituted a minority of the respondents. Most of the adolescent males interviewed seemed to have agemate networks for social support, which, if not echo chambers of their own soul searching, at the very least were sodalities on which to lean for emotional support.

Recommendations

This study highlighted critically important peculiarities that can afflict adolescent male interpersonal communication and behaviour traits. However, its focus was limited to two urban constituencies whose social dynamics may not bear all the factors and behaviours of male adolescents elsewhere in Namibia. Granted that the study sought from its inception to focus on the communication traits of urban adolescents, there remains a research gap for a study that is nationwide in the African context, perhaps with a broader focus on peri-urban and rural adolescents whose upbringing, social and physical environment may contrast significantly with those which influence the urban adolescents studied here. Future studies may also canvass and contrast adolescent experiences from larger population samples than were generated in the current study. Lastly, attempts to address adolescent male communication traits cannot be approached through the prisms of authoritarian adult-to-adolescent discourses. In fact, understanding adolescent attitudes requires an appreciation of the range of pressures which may or may not be similar to the adolescent experiences of contemporary adults. This study, therefore, recommends using skilled intermediaries like social workers, youth counselors, pastors, and behavioural psychologists to bridge communication gaps that may arise in daily interactions between adults and their adolescent family members.

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